Rochester's Landmark Buildings

(and their stories)

by Tom Fortunato

A presentation for the Rochester Philatelic Association, 2020

The City of Rochester, NY has a rich architectural history seen through its buildings of today and images of the past.

Iconic companies and wealthy businessmen often built skyscrapers downtown that took their name, including Kodak, Xerox and Bausch & Lomb. The buildings are still here while their original occupants are gone. Here are seven classic structures still on the city skyline you may not be so familiar with. Next time you drive by you'll know more about them.

This brief presentation uses advertising covers, postcards and photos to make the reader aware of what was and still is in the Flower City. Enjoy! Let's start out with an easy quiz…

How many of these Rochester sites can you identify from 1937?

Look at each letter and identify the landmark shown.

Answers appear on the next slide. They are all still around!

How did you do?

R Eastman Theater

O U of R Library

C Highland Park

H Public Library

E Veteran's Memorial Bridge

S Cumberland Post Office

T Driving Park Bridge

E Charlotte Bath House

R Auditorium Theater

Buildings in this presentation include:

West Main St Area

- Duffy-Powers Building
- Powers Building/Hotel
- German Insurance Company Building
- Ellwanger and Barry Building

East Main St Area

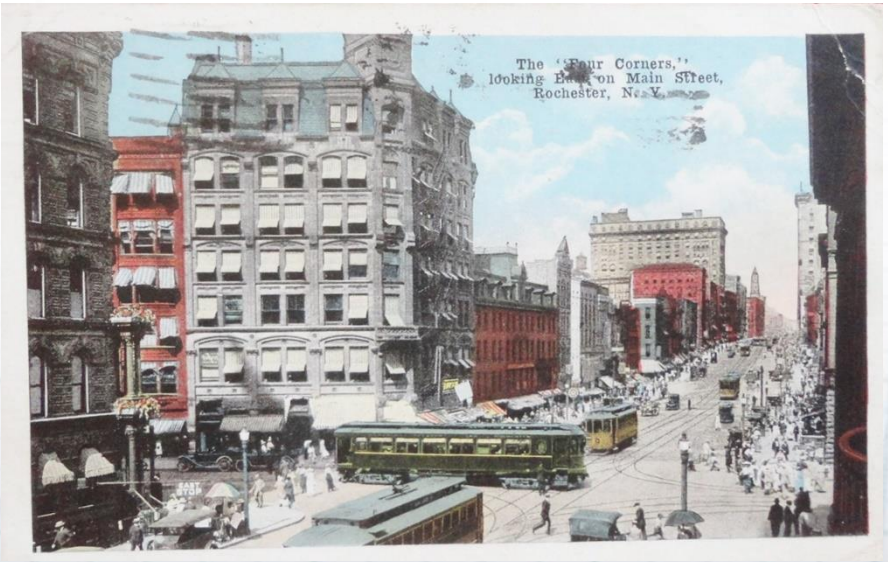
- Wilder Building
- Granite Building
- Sibley Triangle Building

These classic buildings are all in central downtown, most around the "Four Corners" intersection of Main and State streets.

100 Acre Plot Tour ← *Look for web links like this throughout the presentation to learn more about the buildings.*

Four Corners, looking north toward State Street, then and now.

It’s not too hard to imagine yourself walking the Rochester streets in the early 1900’s.



Looking east down Main Street.

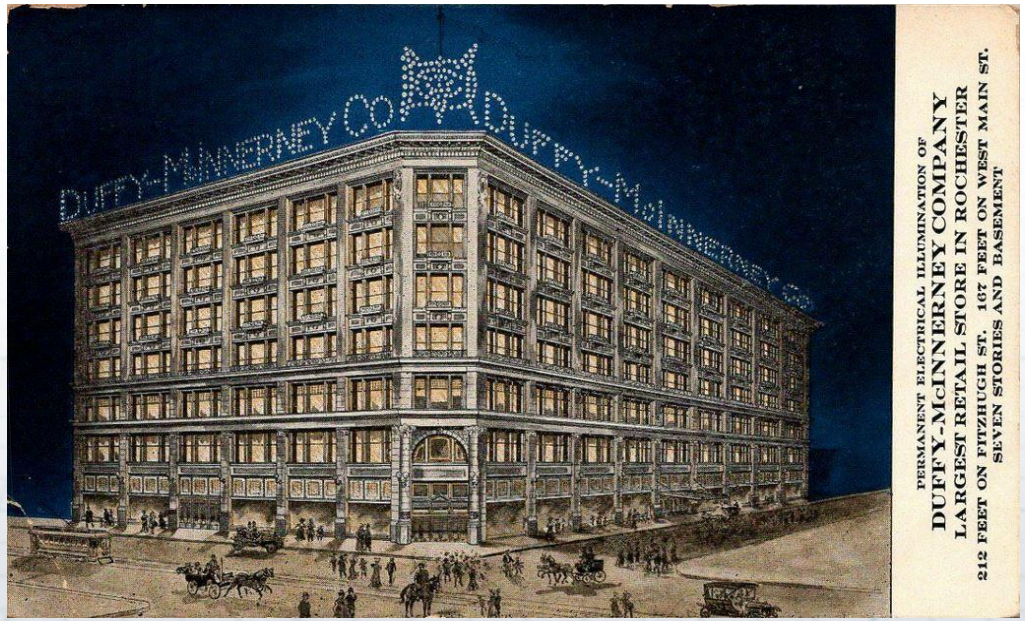
from "Rochester Subway"

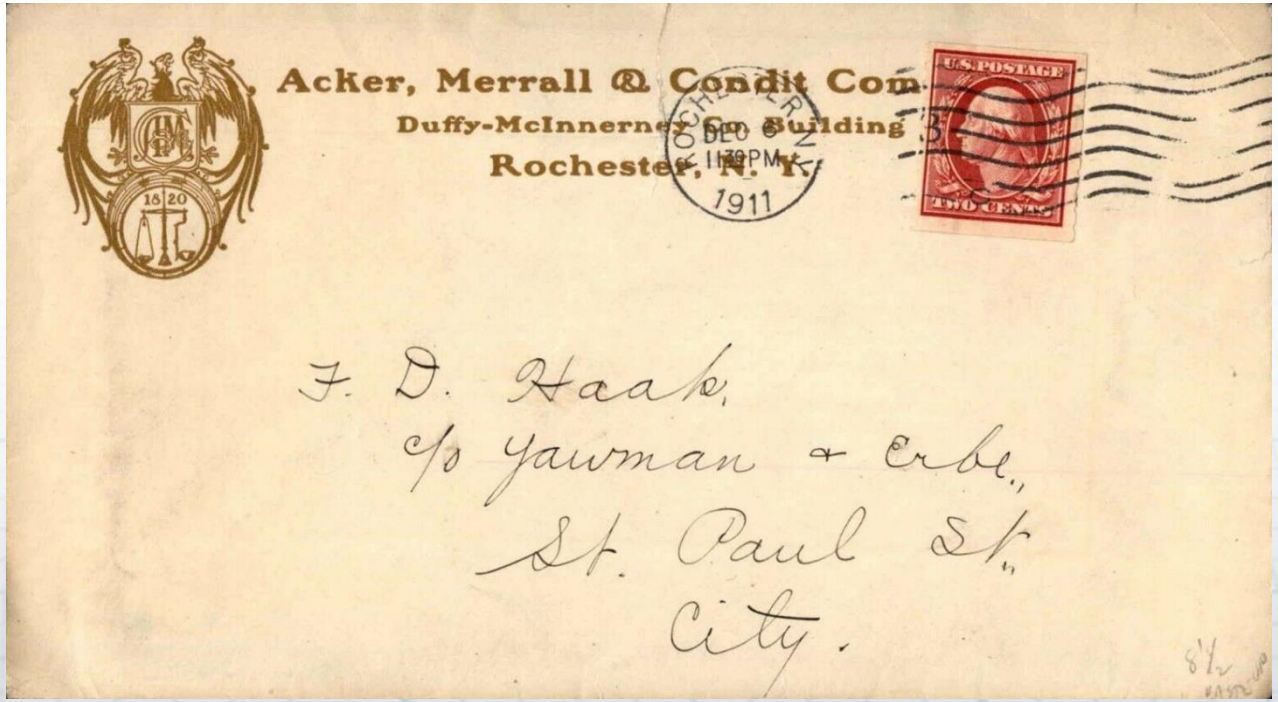
Emporis

First stop on West Main Street is the Duffy-Powers Co. Building, formerly Duffy-McInnerney, finished in 1904.

Duffy-Powers Building, 50 West Main St

Businessmen James Duffy and Thomas Henry McInnerney built the 7 story structure to house their department store, the second largest in the state. The top 7th floor 800-seat restaurant was a unique attraction to the original department store versus rival Sibley's. It was also the first Rochester building to be electrified, using Edison light bulbs.



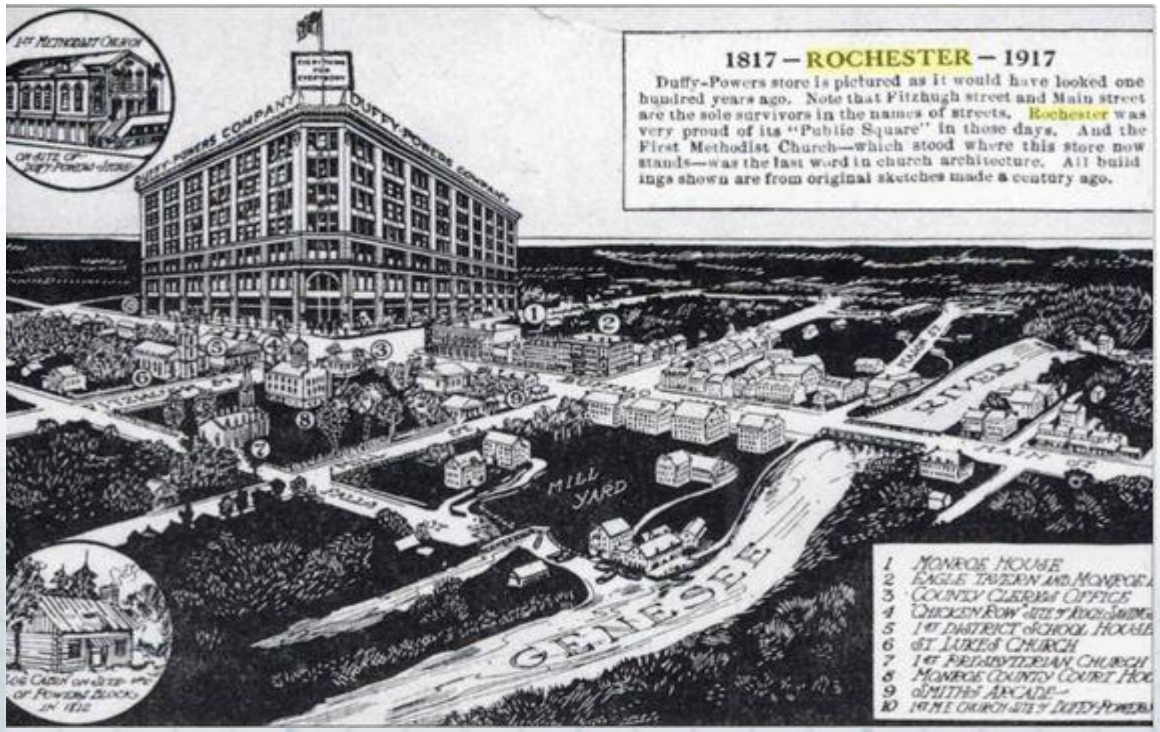


[Building Story](#)

Duffy-Powers Building, 50 West Main St

On July 17, 1911 the building and business converted to the Duffy-Powers Company, with Walter Powers buying out McInnerney. It was the first department store that clerks cashed out customers who picked out their own merchandise rather than having clerks bring items to the customer.

[The Store that Came Back]



Duffy-Powers Building, 50 West Main St

The Duffy-Powers Company went out of business in 1932 during the Great Depression. The building remained vacant until 1940 when Kodak bought it to work on a secret project for the Navy creating radio proximity fuses that helped to improve bombing shell accuracy. During the 1960s Rochester Institute of Technology used it as part of its campus.

[Duffy Biography]

RIT Eager To Get Duffy-Powers Bldg.

TIMES UNION MAR 1 1 1961

Duffy-Powers Building, 50 West Main St

It’s now named City Place and mostly occupied by Monroe County department offices.

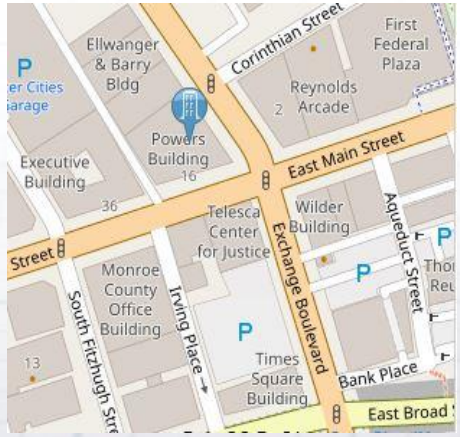
County Purchase

Duffy-Powers Building, 50 West Main St

Facts

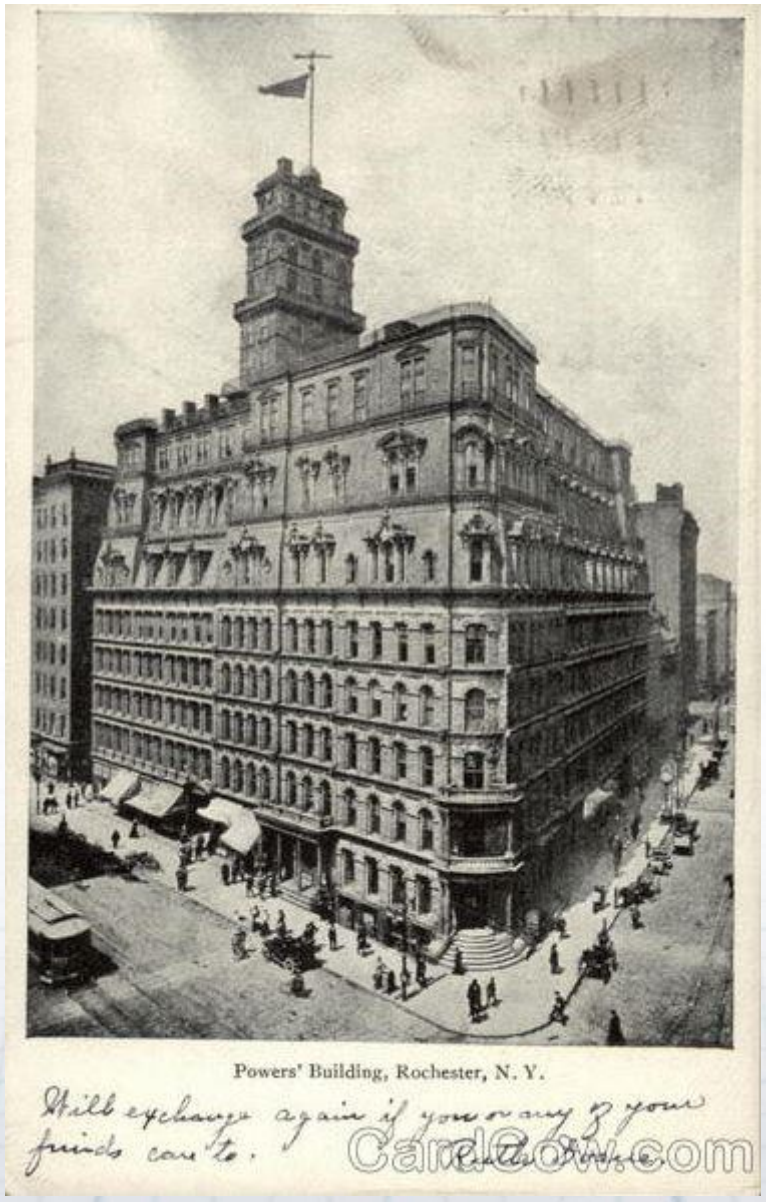
- The Powers Building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.
- This was the first building in Rochester with electricity and gas lighting.
- In addition to the cast-iron facade, materials that went into this French Second Empire styled building include wrought iron beams from France, marble, granite, and free-stone.
- Martha Matilda Harper (1857-1950), pioneer of the retail franchise concept in America and the first female member of the Rochester Chamber of Commerce, started her hair and skin care products business in the Powers Building in 1888. She built it from there into an international empire.
- The building's design is typical of post-Civil War architecture with its Ohio sandstone facade, cast-iron decorations, dormer windows, belt courses, and mansard roofs.
- When the original structure was completed in 1870 it was hailed as Rochester's first fireproof structure and the only building west of New York City equipped with elevators.
- Both this building and the adjacent hotel were built by local banker and broker Daniel W. Powers (1818-97).
- A major addition in 1891 added the tower, raising the height from 8 to 13 stories. This was done in competition with the neighboring Wilder Building for the title of tallest building in Rochester.

First known as the Powers Block, then the Powers Building, the anchor of Rochester's Four Corners is probably the most historic of any property in the city. The facts at the left detail just a few fascinating tidbits.



Emporis

Powers Building, 16 West Main St/Powers Hotel, 36 West Main St

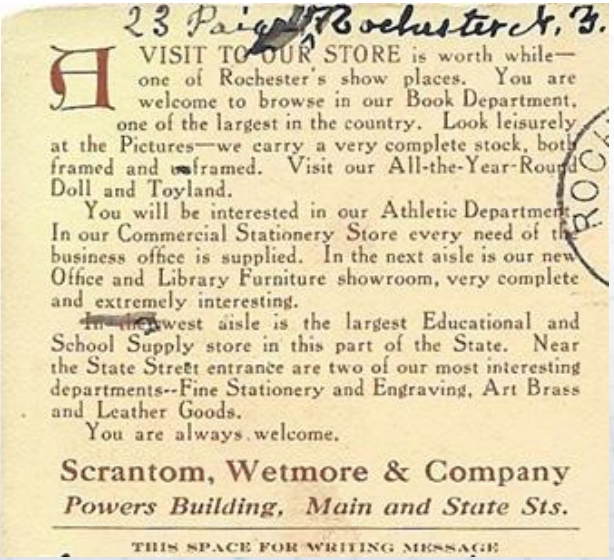


This was another design by architect Andrew Jackson Warner, completed in 1869 with additions made through 1888 by owner Daniel Powers including a triple roof and an observation tower to make it the city's tallest building.

[Sentinel of the Four Corners]

Powers Building, 16 West Main St/Powers Hotel, 36 West Main St

Per the Powers Building web site, "The building was the first in upstate New York to have a passenger elevator (then called a vertical railroad), gas illumination and marble floors. In 1861 it became the first commercial structure in Rochester to have electricity, utilizing its own power generating boilers." Stationer company Scrantom's was its 1st level floor tenant for years.



23 Paige St Rochester N.Y.

A VISIT TO OUR STORE is worth while—one of Rochester's show places. You are welcome to browse in our Book Department, one of the largest in the country. Look leisurely at the Pictures—we carry a very complete stock, both framed and unframed. Visit our All-the-Year-Round Doll and Toyland.

You will be interested in our Athletic Department. In our Commercial Stationery Store every need of the business office is supplied. In the next aisle is our new Office and Library Furniture showroom, very complete and extremely interesting.

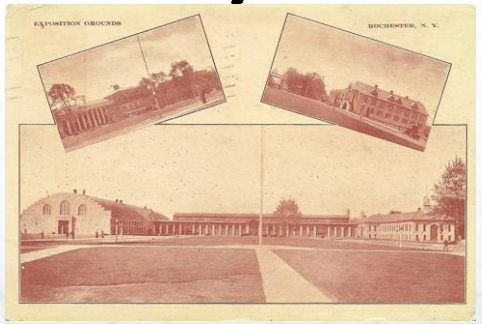
In the west aisle is the largest Educational and School Supply store in this part of the State. Near the State Street entrance are two of our most interesting departments--Fine Stationery and Engraving, Art Brass and Leather Goods.

You are always welcome.

Scrantom, Wetmore & Company

Powers Building, Main and State Sts.

THIS SPACE FOR WRITING MESSAGE

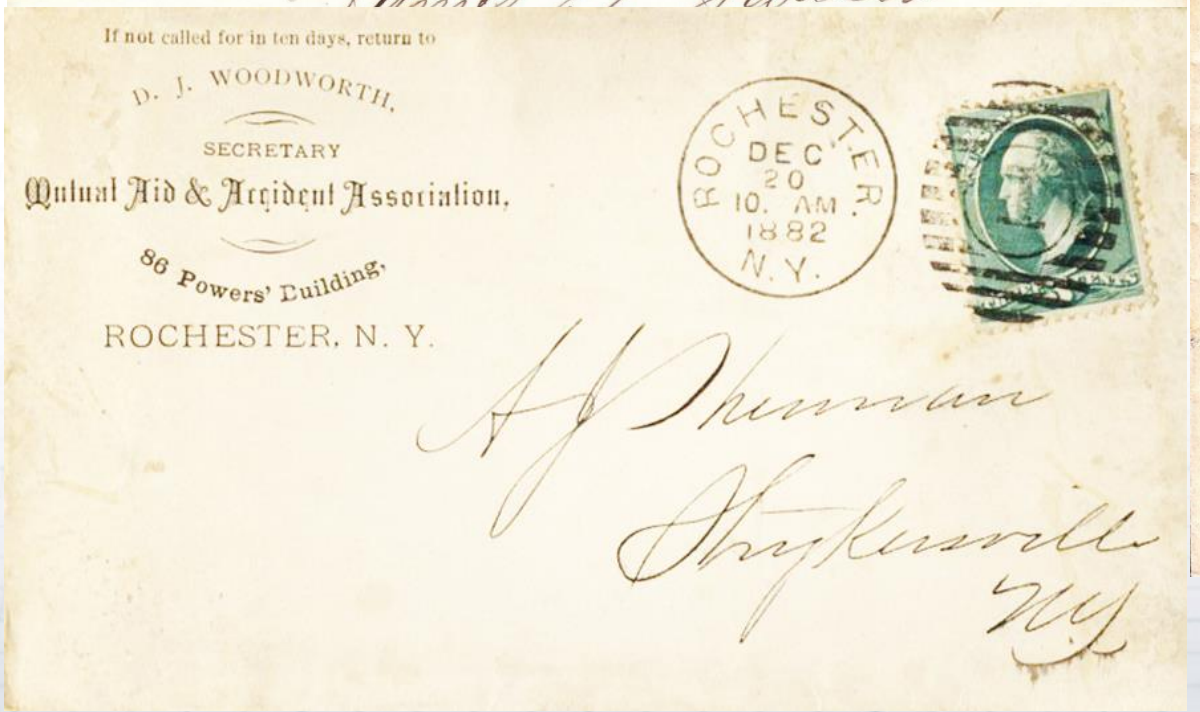


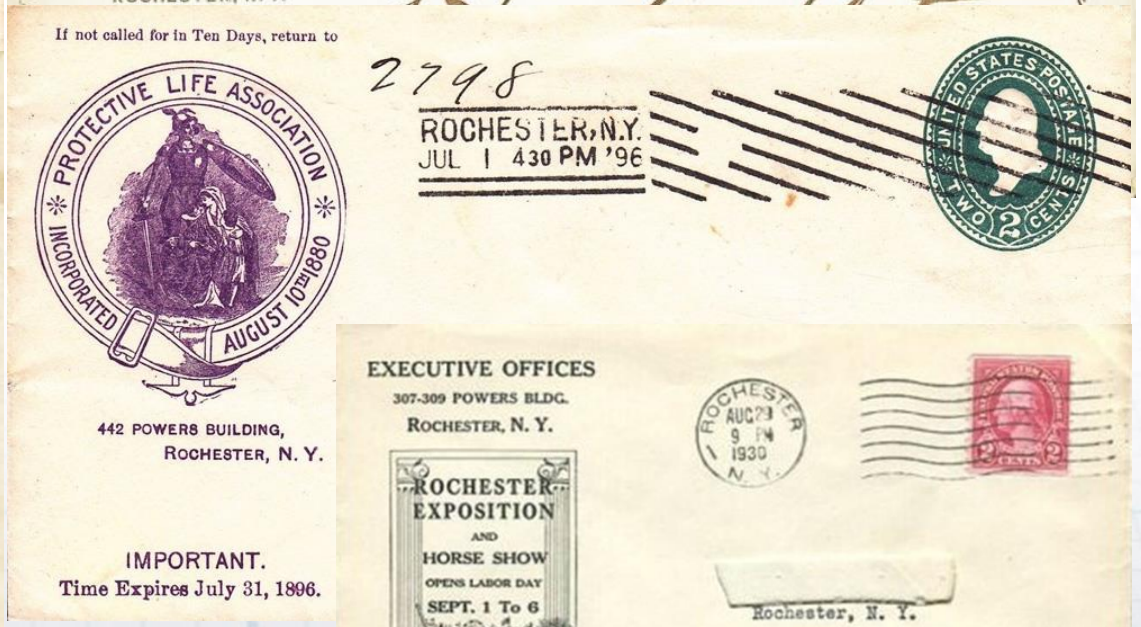
Text from a 1911 post card given away at the Rochester Exposition Grounds.

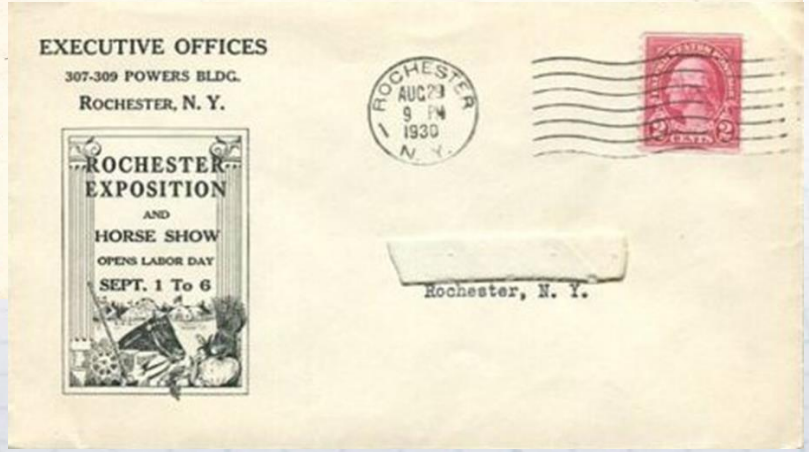
Powers Building.com

Powers Building, 16 West Main St/Powers Hotel, 36 West Main St

More tenants.



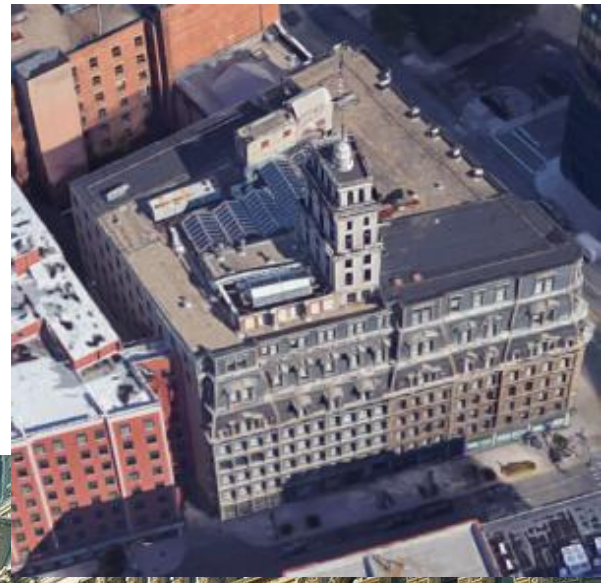


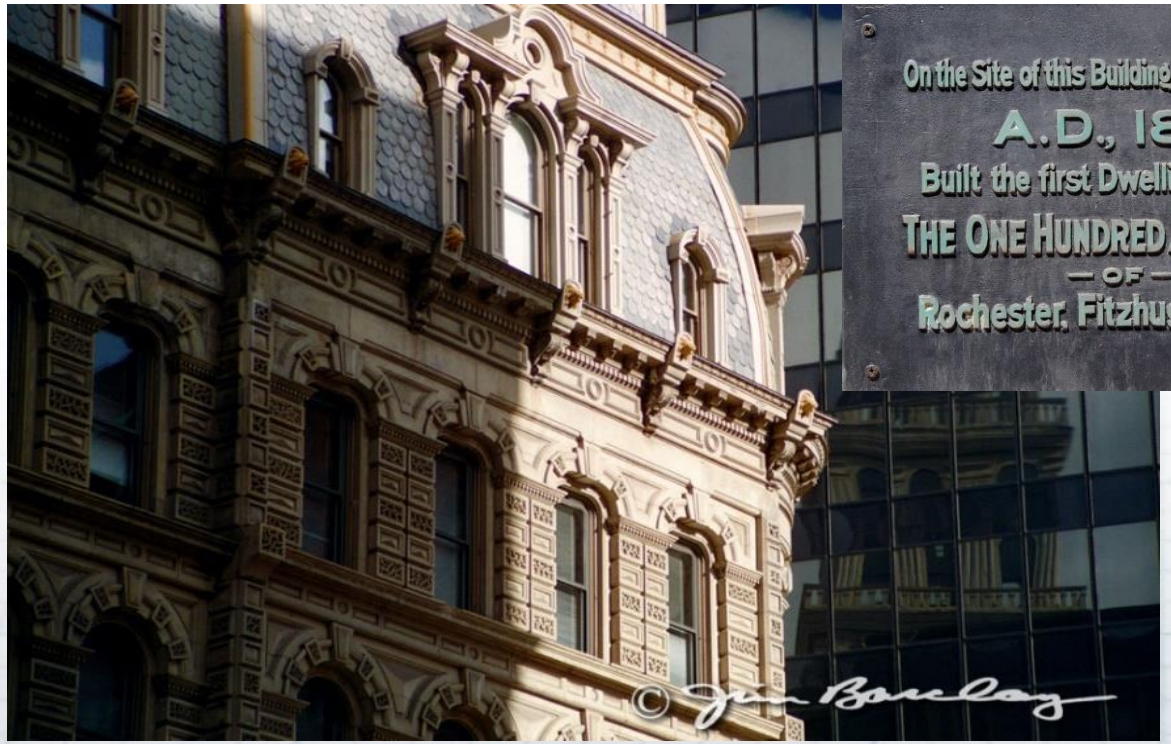


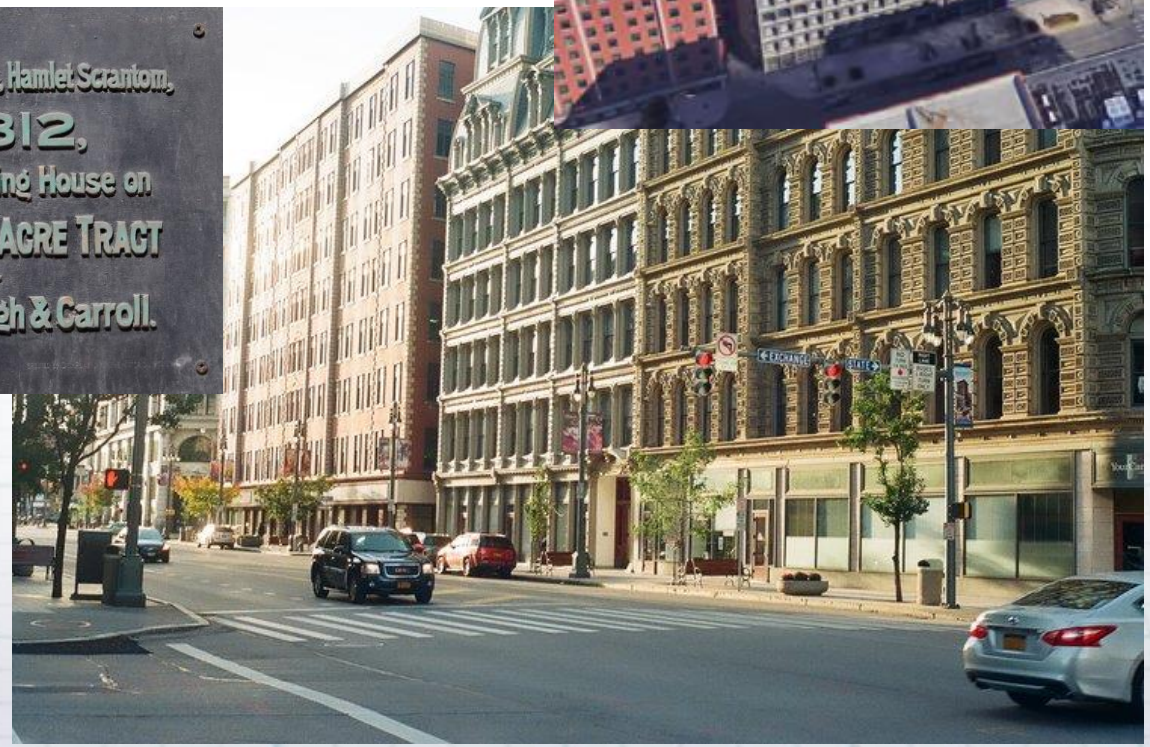
[Yelp! Building Reviews]

Powers Building, 16 West Main St/Powers Hotel, 36 West Main St

The Power Building and environs today.



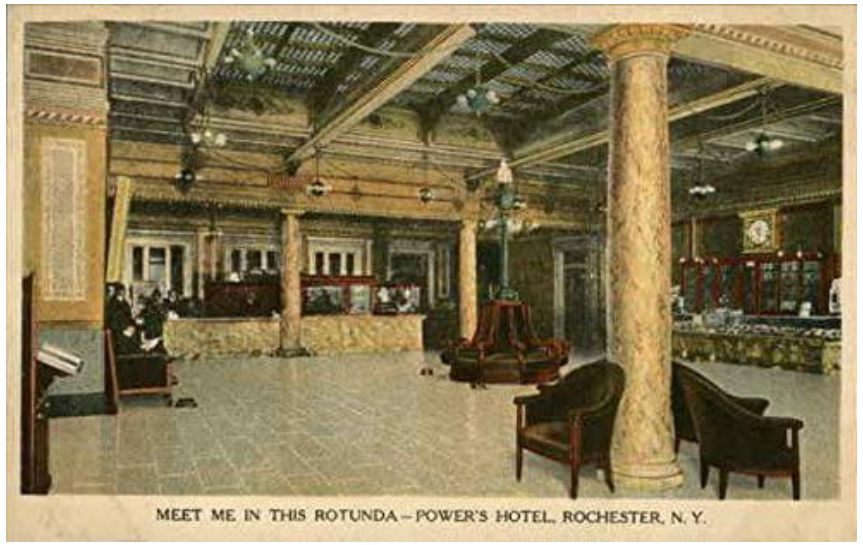




[WayMarking Page]

Powers Building, 16 West Main St/Powers Hotel, 36 West Main St

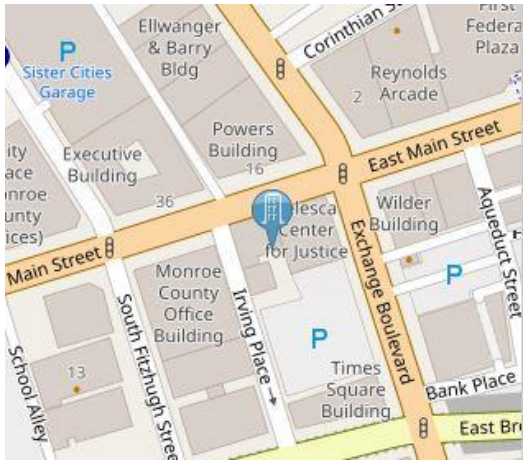
The Powers Hotel was next door, now known as the Executive Building.



[Powers Hotel History]

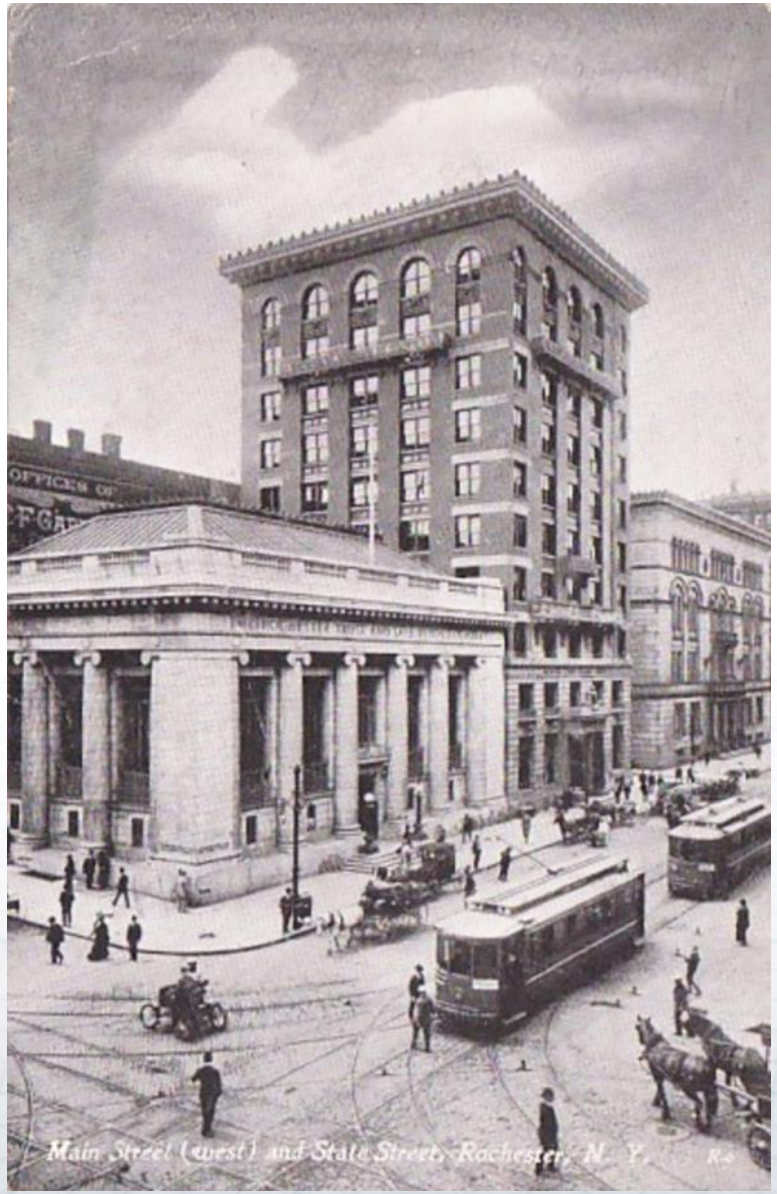
Powers Building, 16 West Main St/Powers Hotel, 36 West Main St

Commonly called the German Insurance Building, this 10 story edifice of red brick with Italianate/ Romanesque styling was finished in 1888. Like the Ellwanger and Barry Building, Andrew Jackson Warner was its architect. But the building under-went a major reconstruction in 1904, doubling its size and shifting its façade formerly overlooking an empty lot on Irving Place (as seen here on both photos) 90 degrees to face Main Street instead.

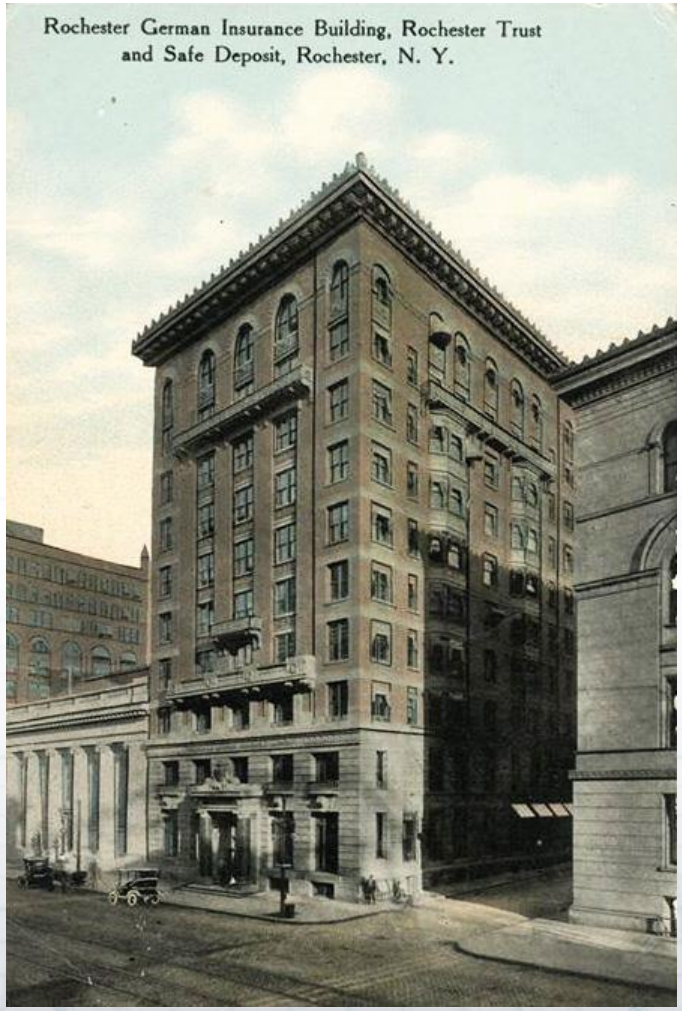


Emporis

German Insurance Company Building, 19 West Main St



Here's how the building looked after its make-over. Note the two columns at the doorway entrance, a new addition to the design by the second builders, A. Friederich & Sons, which by the way was constructing the Rochester Trust & Safe Deposit Co. next door at the same time as seen on the left of both postcards here.

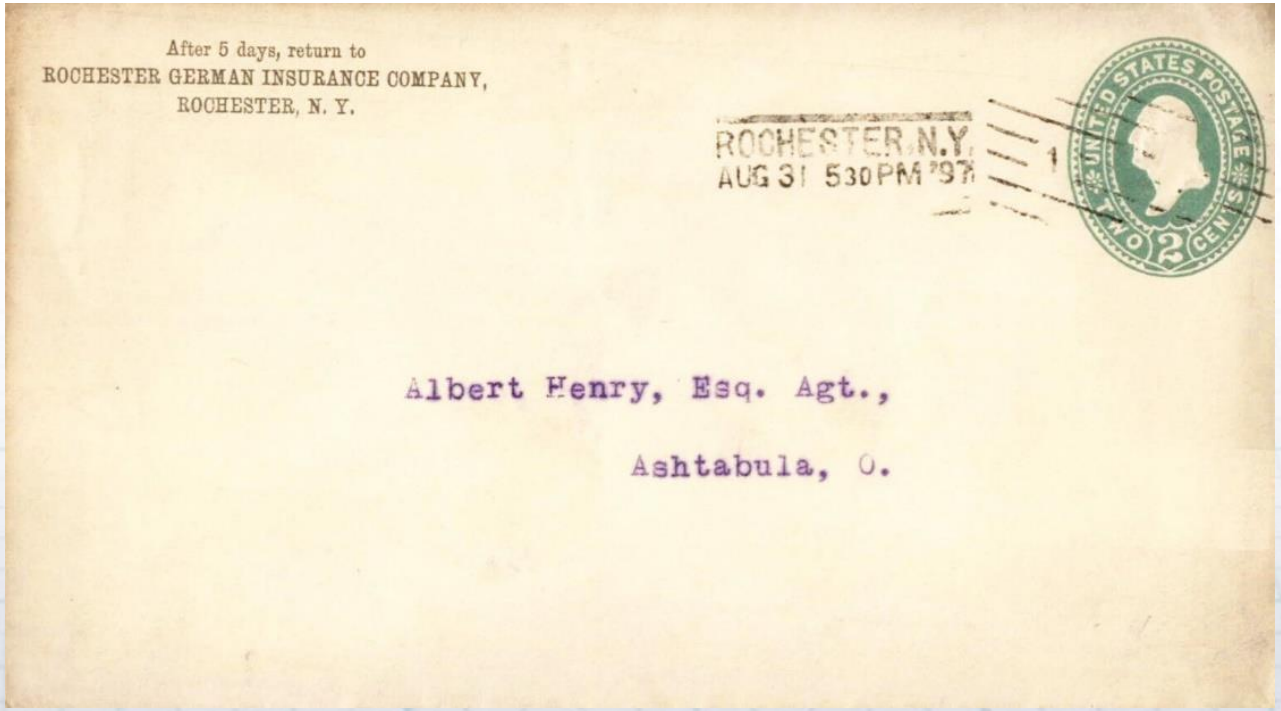


[Building History]

Rochester German Insurance Building, 19 West Main St

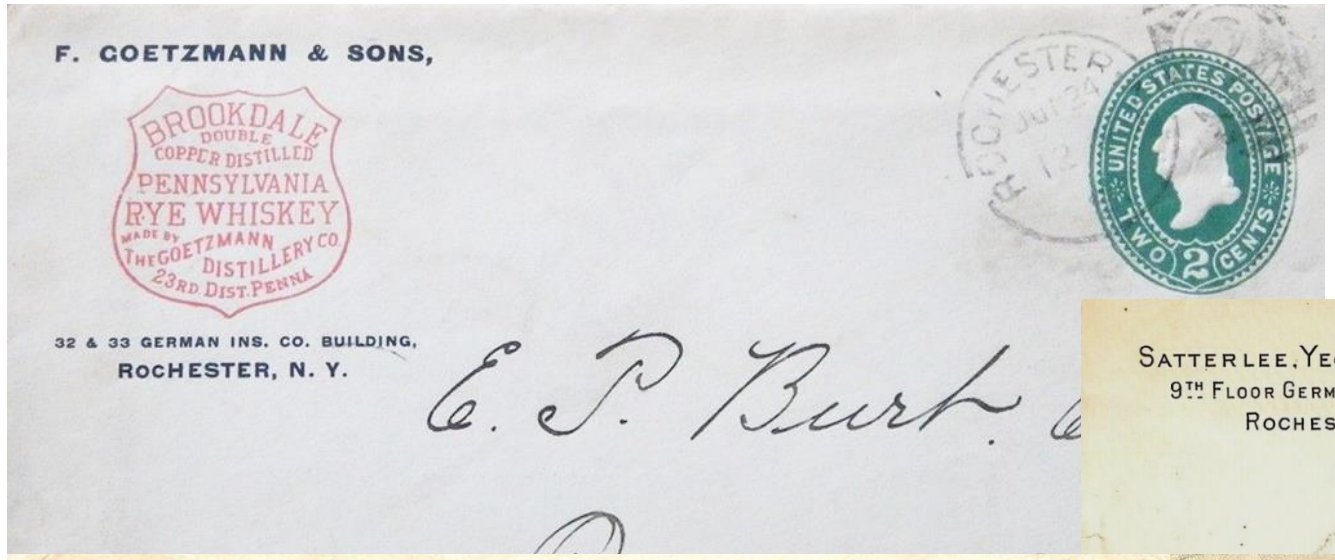
The German Insurance Company set up offices in major US cities across the country. Rochester's firm was founded by a number of successful German-born Rochester businessmen. It was incorporated in 1872, specializing in insuring livestock and buildings. The company was absorbed by the German-American Insurance Company in May, 1911.

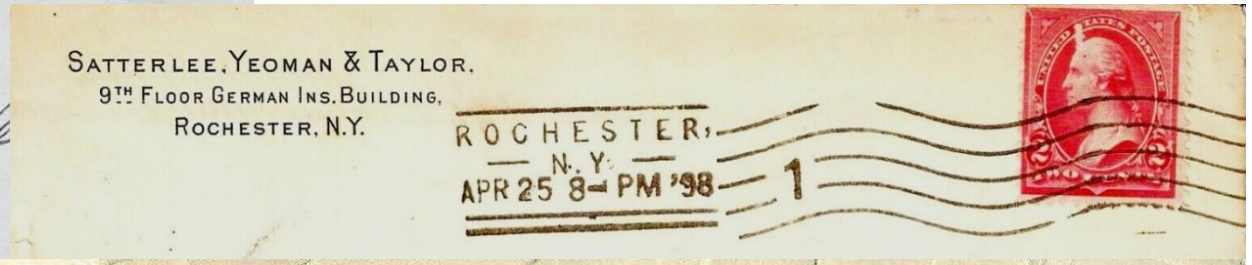
History and Commerce of Rochester 1894

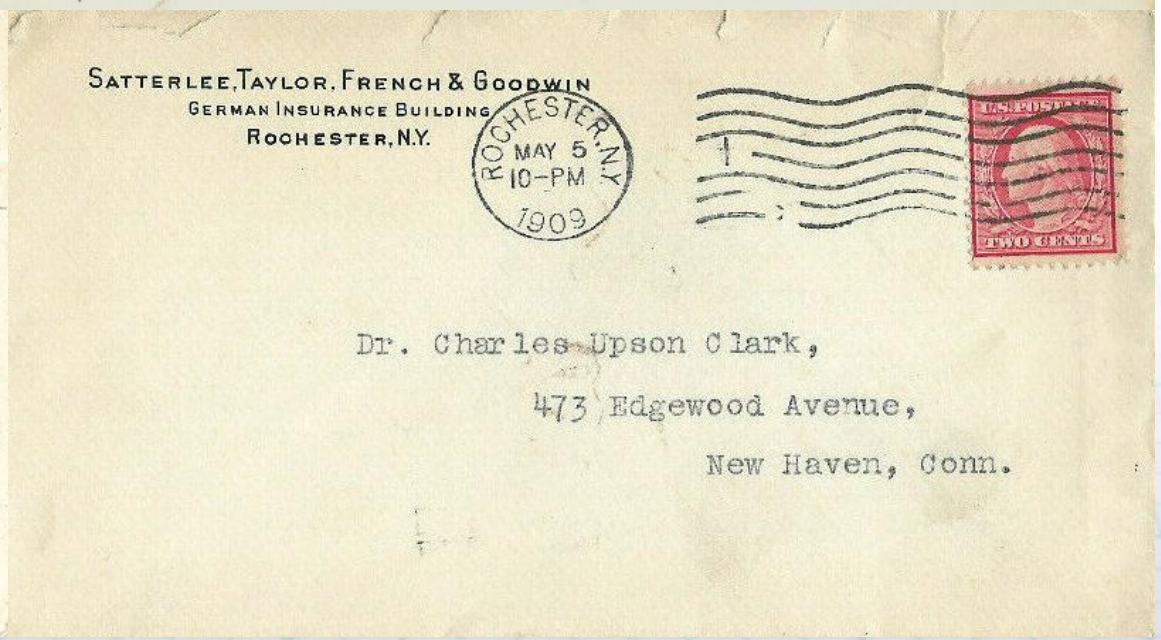


German Insurance Company Building, 19 West Main St

The 10 story building had many occupants over the years.



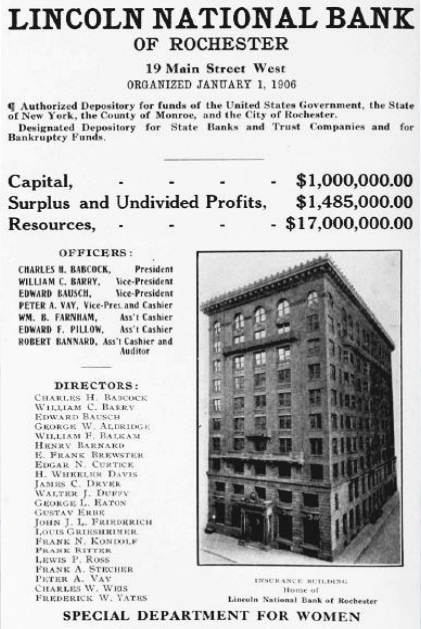




Industries of Rochester 1888

German Insurance Company Building, 19 West Main St

A dizzying number of banks occupied parts of the German Insurance Company Building in the early teens due to mergers and acquisitions. The German American Bank, the Flour City National Bank and the Commercial Bank all called 19 Main St West home for a brief time, until they merged into the National Bank of Rochester, which then became headquarters of the Lincoln National Bank. World War I soldiers walk by the building in this photo, c. 1918. Note the bank's signage in the upper left above the column.



LINCOLN NATIONAL BANK
OF ROCHESTER
19 Main Street West
ORGANIZED JANUARY 1, 1906

¶ Authorized Depository for funds of the United States Government, the State of New York, the County of Monroe, and the City of Rochester.
Designated Depository for State Banks and Trust Companies and for Bankruptcy Funds.

Capital, - - - - $1,000,000.00
Surplus and Undivided Profits, $1,485,000.00
Resources, - - - - $17,000,000.00

OFFICERS:
CHARLES H. BABCOCK, President
WILLIAM C. BARRY, Vice-President
EDWARD BAUSCH, Vice-President
PETER A. VAY, Vice-Pres. and Cashier
WM. B. FARNHAM, Ass't Cashier
EDWARD F. PILLOW, Ass't Cashier
ROBERT BANNARD, Ass't Cashier and Auditor

DIRECTORS:
CHARLES H. BABCOCK
WILLIAM C. BARRY
EDWARD BAUSCH
GEORGE W. ALDRIDGE
WILLIAM F. BALCAM
HENRY BARNARD
E. FRANK BREWSTER
EDGAR N. CUTTICK
H. WHEELER DAVIS
JAMES C. DRYER
WALTER J. DUFFY
GEORGE L. EATON
GUSTAV ERBE
JOHN J. L. FREDDRICH
LOUIS GRIESHEIMER
FRANK N. KONDOLF
FRANK SITTER
LEWIS P. ROSS
FRANK A. STECHER
PETER A. VAY
CHARLES W. WEIS
FREDERICK W. YATES

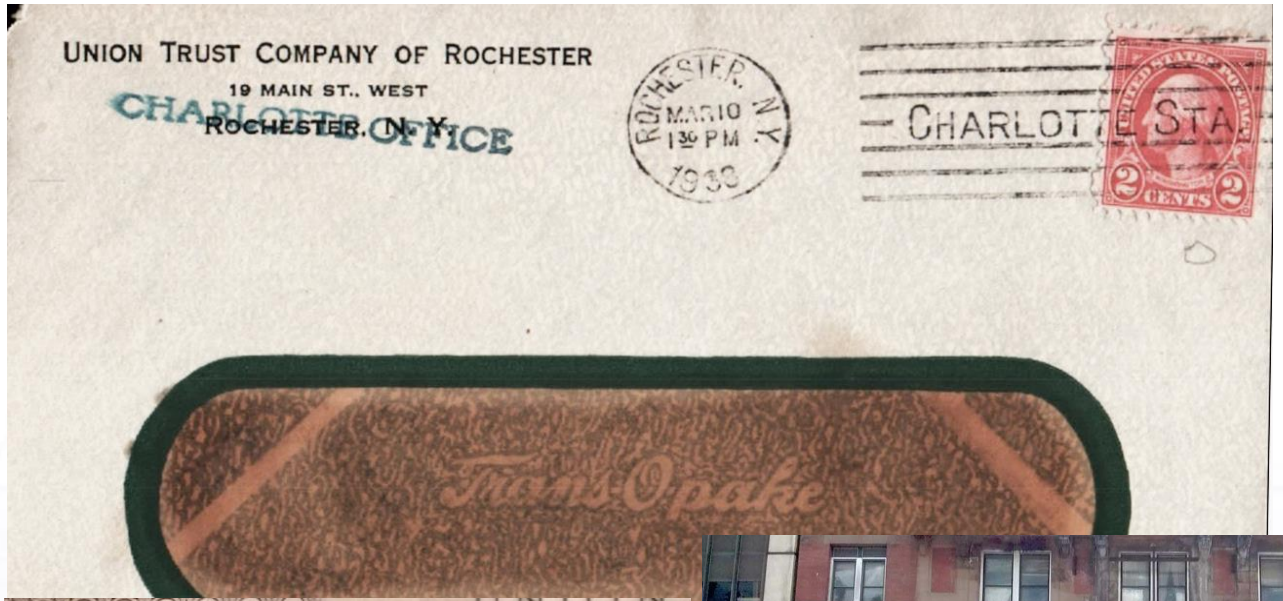
INSURANCE BUILDING
Home of
Lincoln National Bank of Rochester

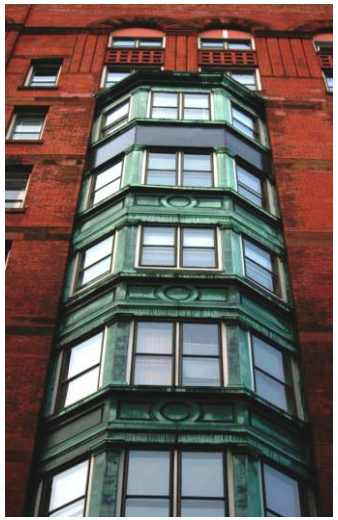
SPECIAL DEPARTMENT FOR WOMEN

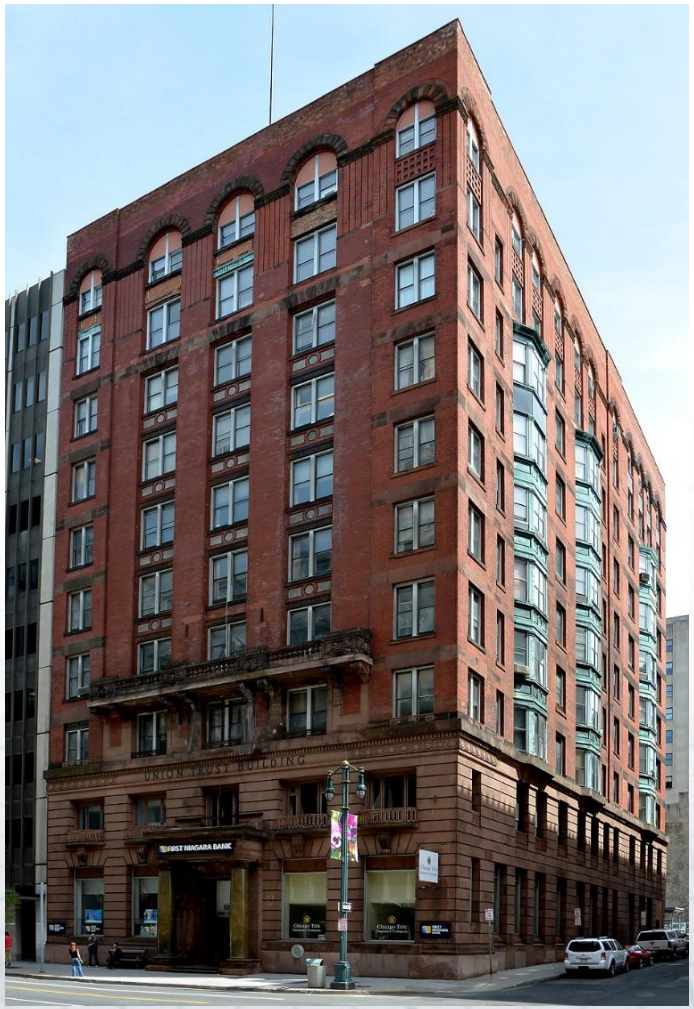
[Rochester Bank Currencies]

German Insurance Company Building, 19 West Main St

In 1925 the Genesee Valley Union Trust Company, another bank, moved into the building and that is the name now over the door.

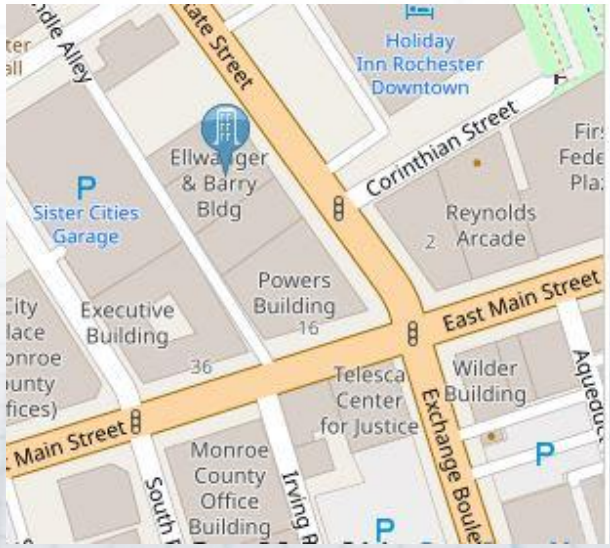


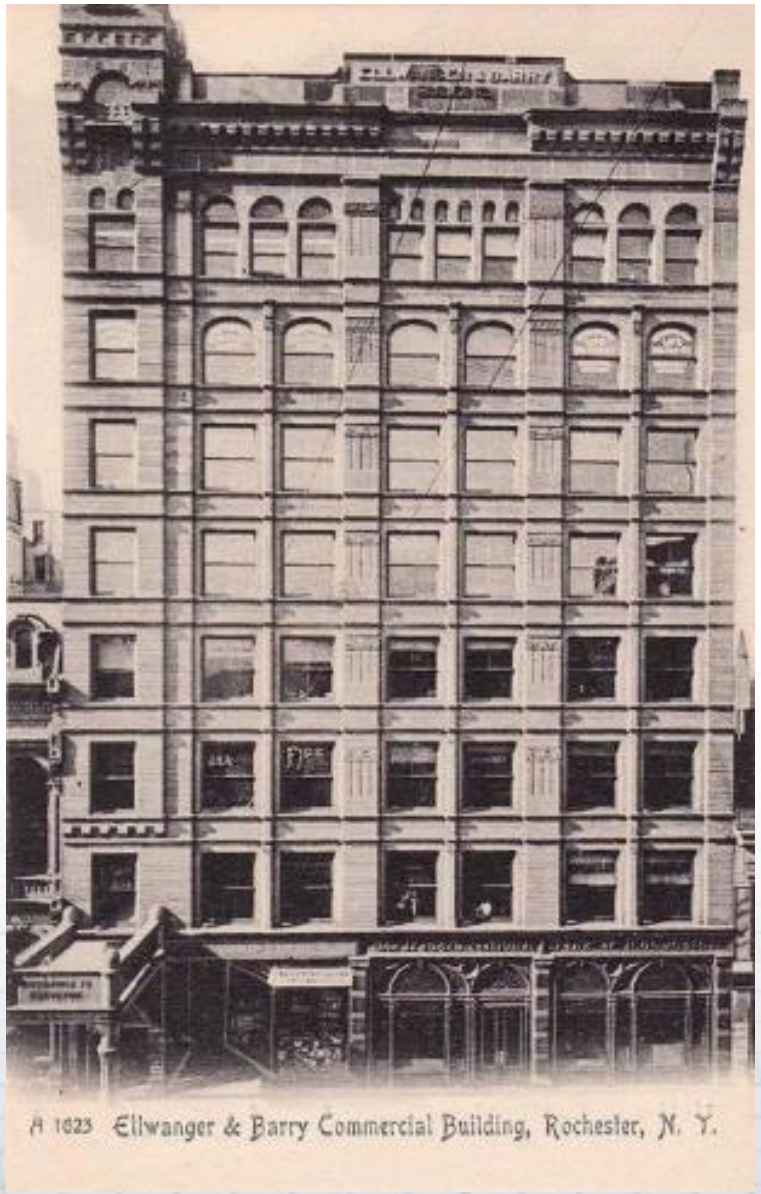




German Insurance Company Building, 19 West Main St

The Ellwanger and Barry Building was completed in 1888 as an 8 story steel building with a brick and masonry façade in the Romanesque revival style. Its interior was describes as, “resplendent in silver bronze which blends artistically with the yellow and blue tiled floors and the bright walls with their imitation brick penciling in bright red lines.” Andrew Jackson Warner was its architect.





Emporis

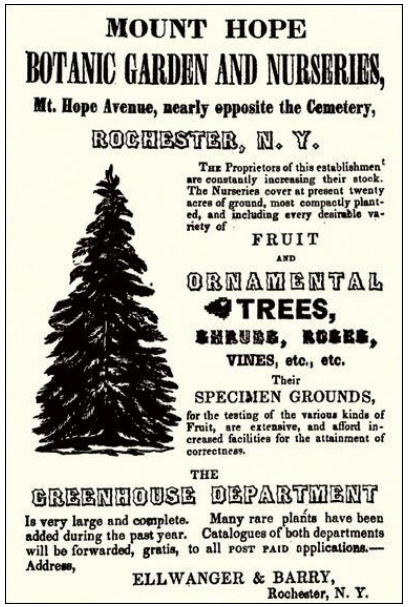
Ellwanger and Barry Building, 39 State St

It was built by its namesake business, the Ellwanger and Barry Nursery Company, the international horticulture company. George Ellwanger was a horticulturist native of Wurttemberg, Germany, who started up the Rochester business in 1840 with Belfast, Ireland native Patrick Barry. Besides their large land holdings on Mt Hope Ave., the company expanded into real estate and home developments in later years, amassing a fortune as the city boomed in the latter half of the 1800's.

U of R Company Paper Collection

Ellwanger and Barry Building, 39 State St

The firm's best subdivision was the 19.63 acre Highland Park, later donated to the City in 1887 and described by them as, "the finest and healthiest part of the city."


MOUNT HOPE
BOTANIC GARDEN AND NURSERIES,
Mt. Hope Avenue, nearly opposite the Cemetery,
ROCHESTER, N. Y.

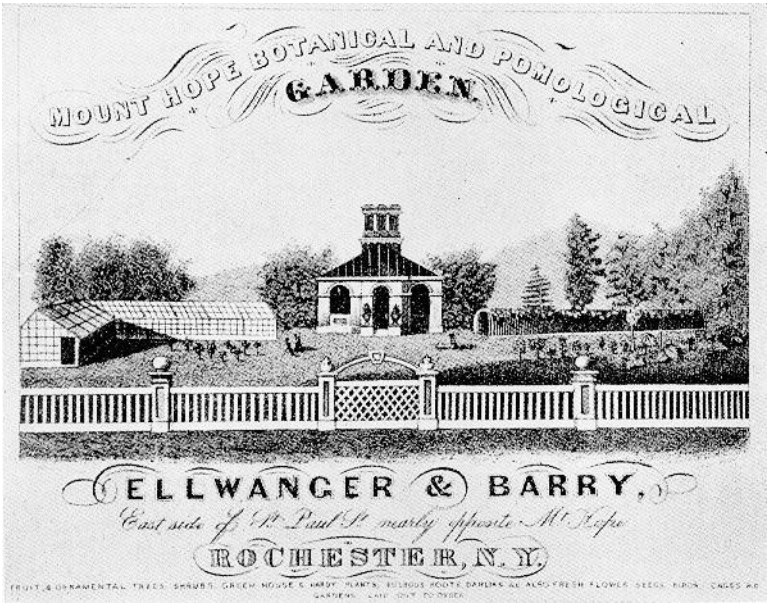
The Proprietors of this establishment are constantly increasing their stock. The Nurseries cover at present twenty acres of ground, most compactly planted, and including every desirable variety of

FRUIT
AND
ORNAMENTAL
TREES,
SHRUBS, ROSES,
VINES, etc., etc.

Their
SPECIMEN GROUNDS,
for the testing of the various kinds of Fruit, are extensive, and afford increased facilities for the attainment of correctness.

THE
GREENHOUSE DEPARTMENT
Is very large and complete. Many rare plants have been added during the past year. Catalogues of both departments will be forwarded, gratis, to all POST PAID applications.—Address,

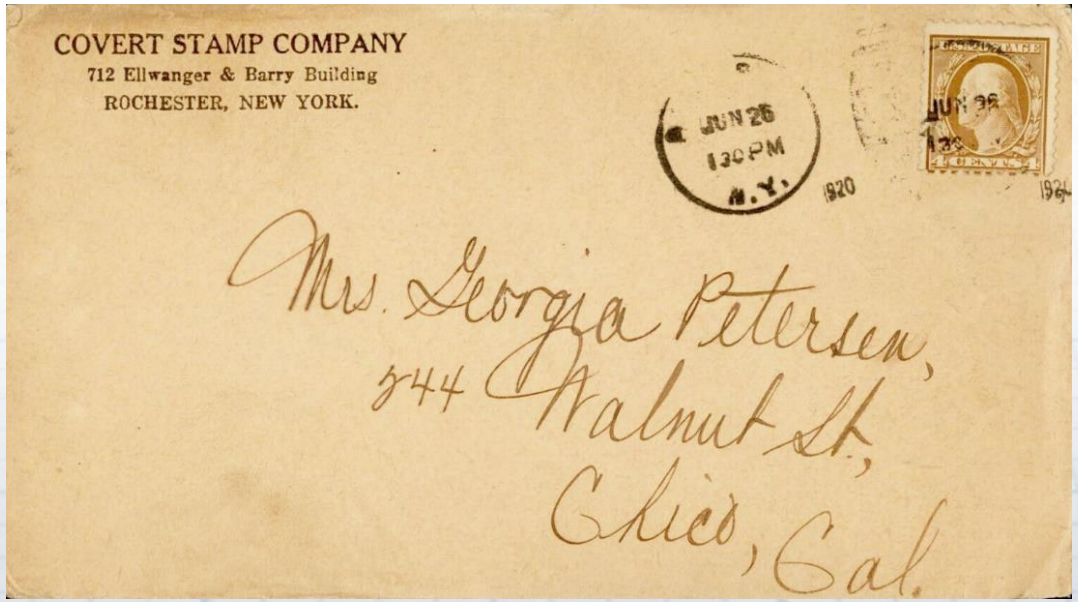
ELLWANGER & BARRY,
Rochester, N. Y.



Highland Park Conservatory

Ellwanger and Barry Building, 39 State St

Philatelists will note one of the building's tenant was the Covert Stamp Company, owned by Paul Wild, 1916 Rochester Philatelic Association president and treasurer from 1919-1940. Per the covers below he had at least two different office locations there.



Ellwanger and Barry Building, 39 State St

Renovated in 1985, the original yellow and blue tiled floors, if still there, were replaced.

Current Availabilities:

- 1st Floor: 2,533 SF
- 2nd Floor: 1,000 - 8,975 SF
- 3rd Floor: 135 - 8,313 SF
- 4th Floor: 2,500 SF
- 5th Floor: 3,000 - 10,600 SF
- 7th Floor: 10,800 SF
- 8th Floor: 10,800 SF

[Buckingham Property offering]

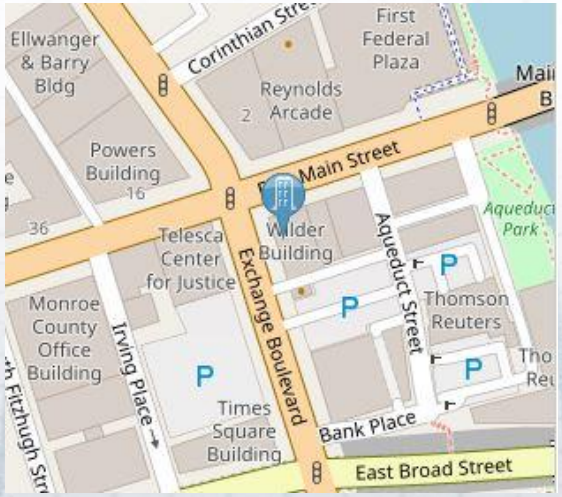
Ellwanger and Barry Building, 39 State St

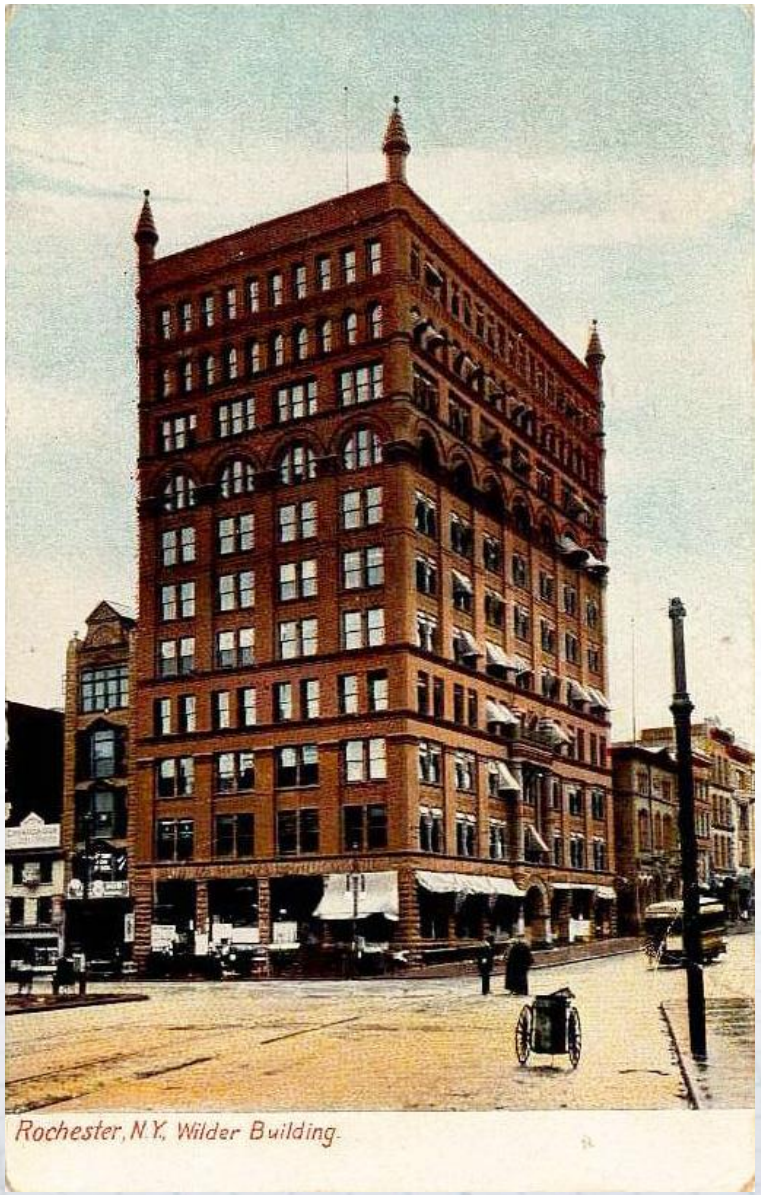
The Wilder Building had a prime spot at 1 East Main Street when completed in 1887. It was designed by architects Warner & Brockett and at 11 stories is considered Rochester's first skyscraper.

Facts

- It was one of the first to use mail chutes, an invention of the building's architect, J. G. Cutler. Cutler marketed the idea successfully with his Cutler Mail Chute Co.
- Designed in the Romanesque style of H. H. Richardson, the Wilder Building features rusticated stonework at the street level, pressed red brick decorated with terra cotta on the upper floors, multiple arched windows, and decorative turrets.
- It has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1985.
- The building was named for its builder, Samuel Wilder, who was a prominent banker and real estate developer.
- It surpassed the nearby Powers Building as Rochester's tallest, until the Powers retook the lead with the addition of its tower.

[Emporis]





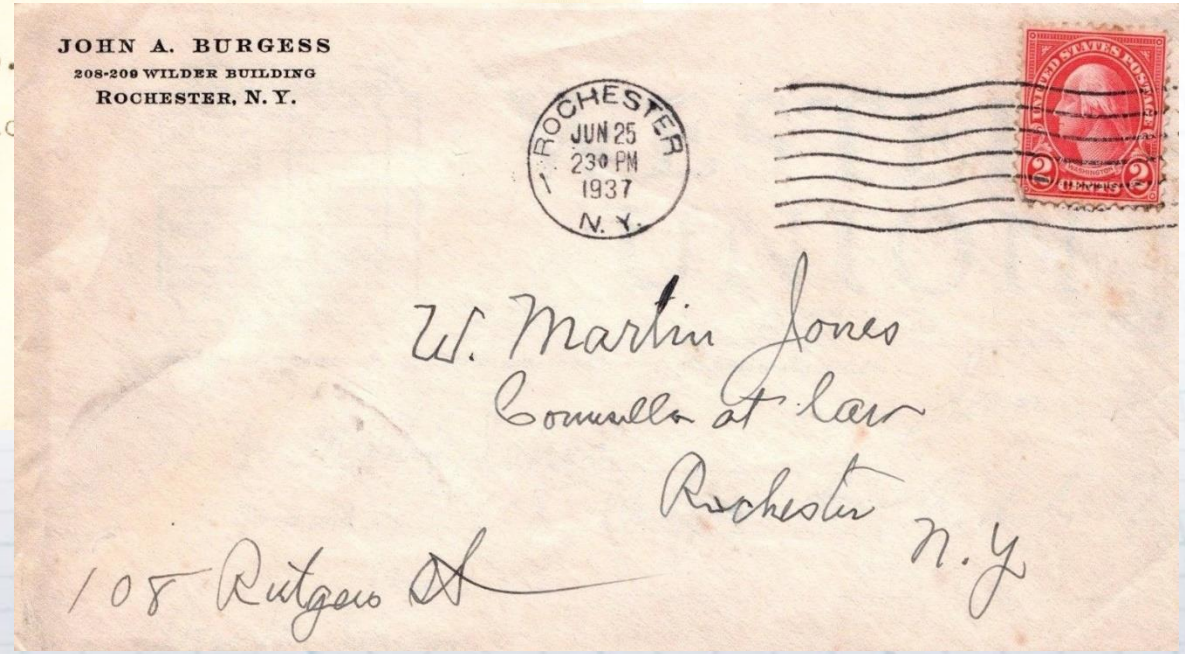
Wilder Building, 1 East Main St

Early tenants.

[Wikipedia Listing]

Wilder Building, 1 East Main St

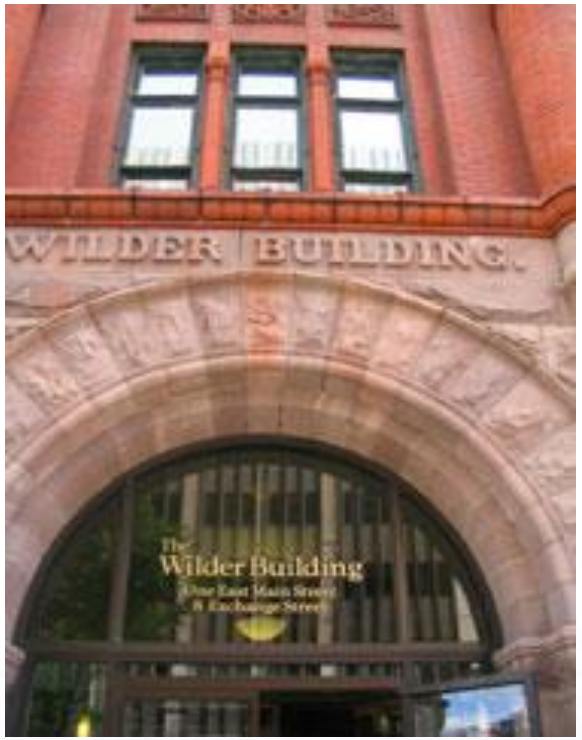
And a few more.



Falcon Watch 2011

Wilder Building, 1 East Main St

The Wilder Building today.



Wilder Offices

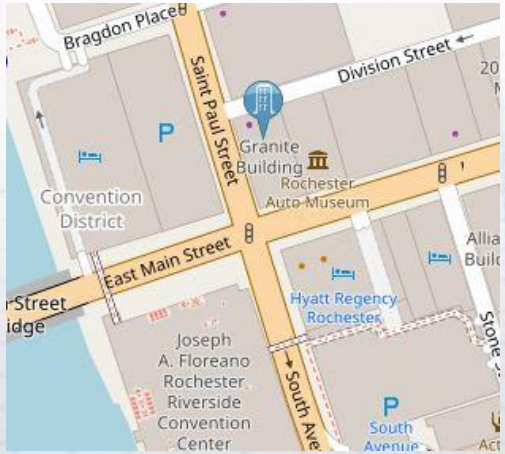
Wilder Building, 1 East Main St

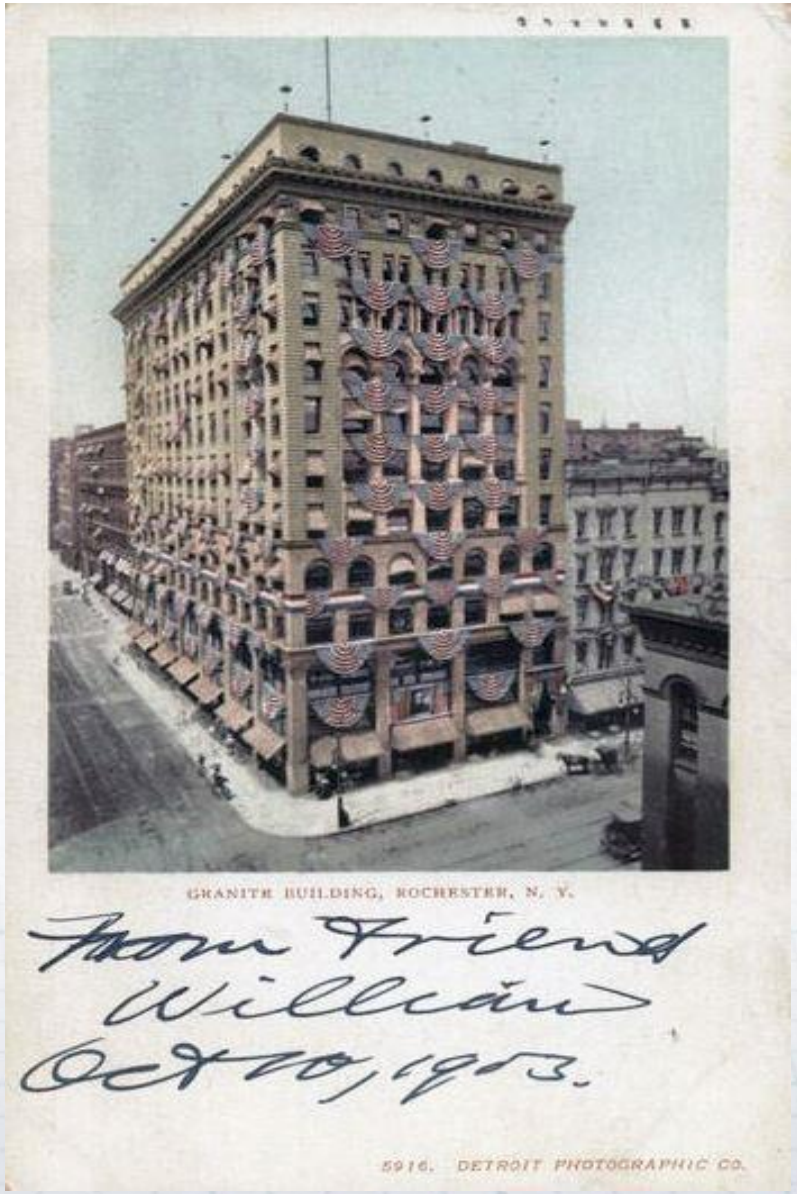
Finished in 1894 and designed by J. Foster Warner, the 12 story Granite Building was covered in brick and masonry. Granite was used extensively inside and out, hence its name, including its massive four story front columns. It was touted as being fully fireproof, an innovation at the time, housing the Sibley, Lindsay and Curr department store.

Facts

- The Granite Building was the first steel-framed skyscraper in Rochester.
- Arched windows add Neo-Renaissance styling to classical elements.
- It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

[Emporis]





Granite Building, 130 East Main St

While the lower levels were dedicated to Sibley's, upper floors were leased to other Rochester businesses, including that of the building's architect whose office was on the top floor.

No claims will be entertained unless reported to us within five days of receipt of goods.

Book 5 Page

New York | Manchester | Paris | Chemnitz

SIBLEY, LINDSAY & CURR CO.

Directors:

Rochester N.Y. Aug 21 1903

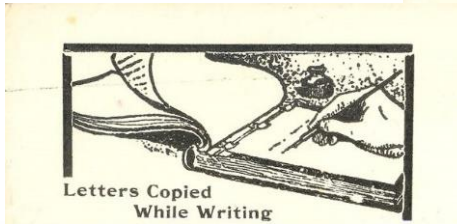
Sold to

Sold by

Conveyance

Terms

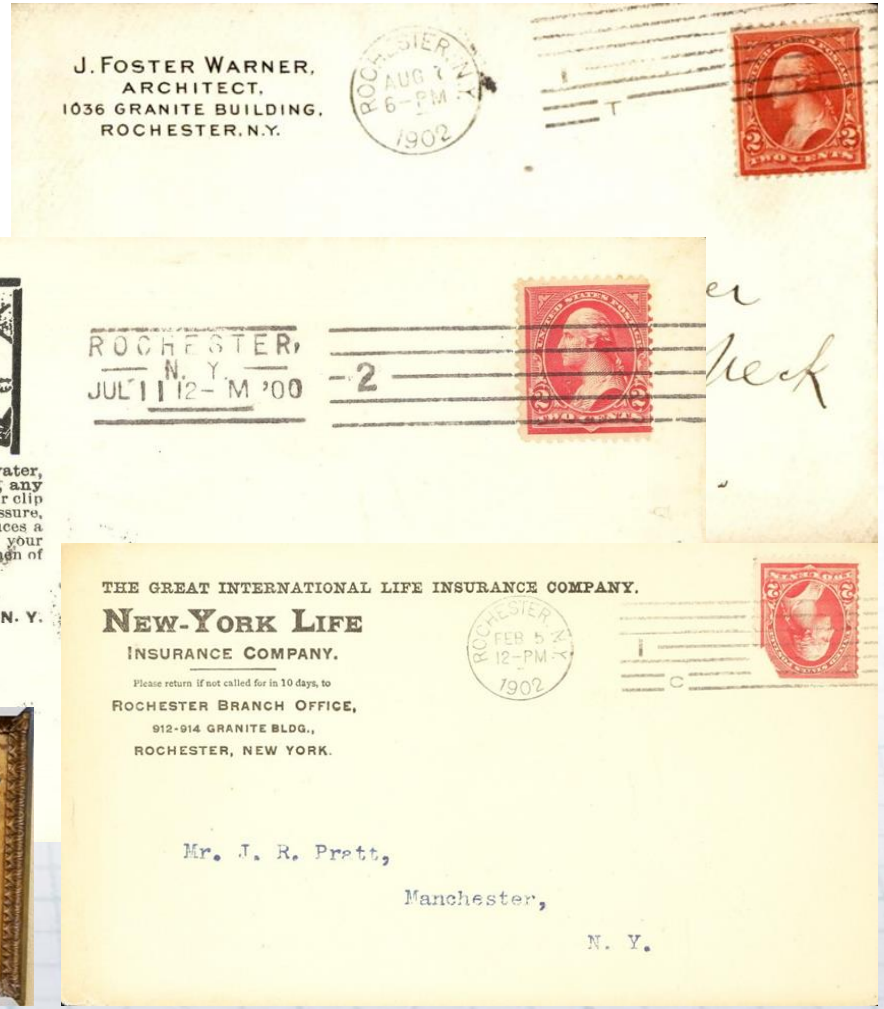
This bill is subject to sight draft if not paid within 30 days.


Letters Copied While Writing

Keep a copy of all letters. No press, no water, no brush, no work. Any ink, any pen, any paper. Our Pen-Carbon never smuts; our clip holds paper firm. Write with no extra pressure, and our Pen-Carbon Letter Book produces a perfect copy. Can be used anywhere. If your stationer does not keep it, write for specimen of work.

Pen-Carbon Manifold Co.,

423-425 GRANITE BLDG., ROCHESTER, N. Y.


J. FOSTER WARNER,
ARCHITECT,
1036 GRANITE BUILDING,
ROCHESTER, N.Y.

ROCHESTER, N. Y.
JUL 11 12-M '00

THE GREAT INTERNATIONAL LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY.
NEW-YORK LIFE
INSURANCE COMPANY.
Please return if not called for in 10 days, to
ROCHESTER BRANCH OFFICE,
912-914 GRANITE BLDG.,
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK.

Mr. J. R. Pratt,
Manchester,
N. Y.

ROC Roots

Granite Building, 130 East Main St

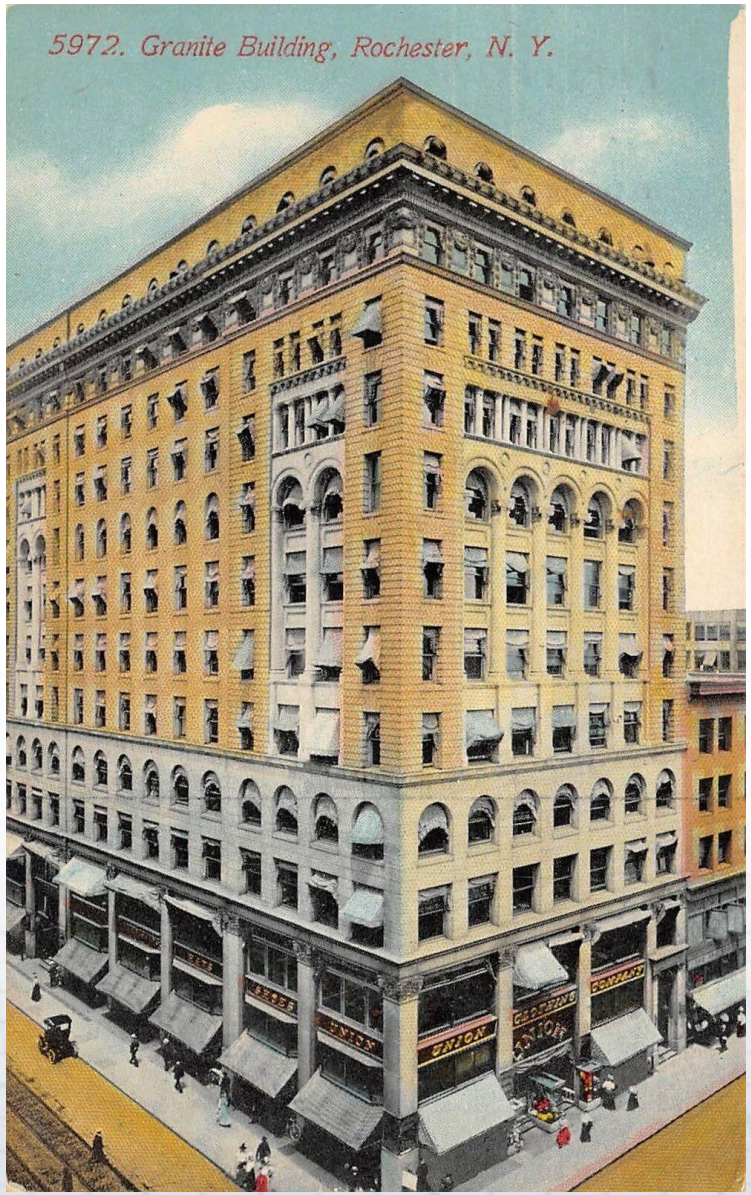
1.5 acres burnt over 40 hours, 8 buildings, 3 houses incinerated

The building was put to the test when a fire at the Rochester Dry Goods Company started at 5 AM on February 26, 1904 destroying several blocks of Main St. It left the shell intact but incinerated the contents. Sibley's built at a new locale down the street.

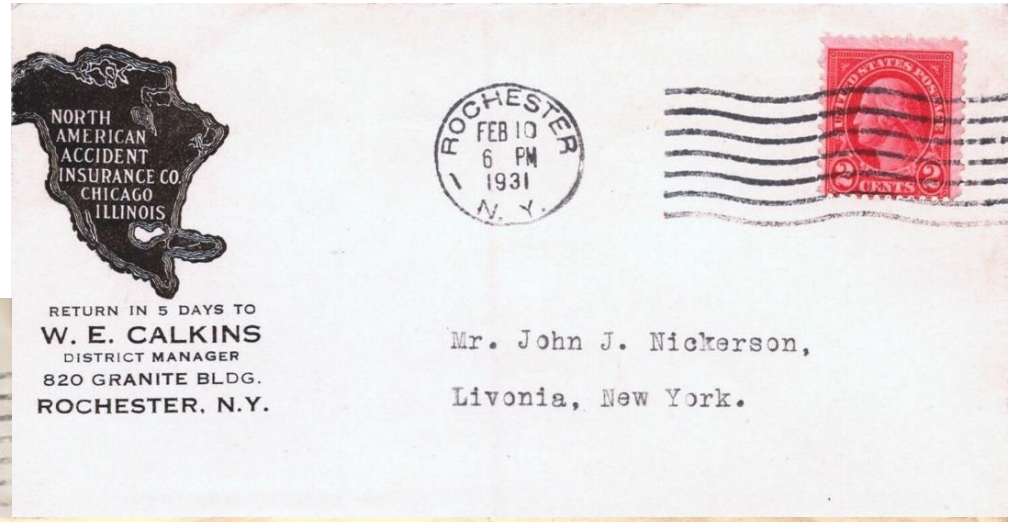
The Fire

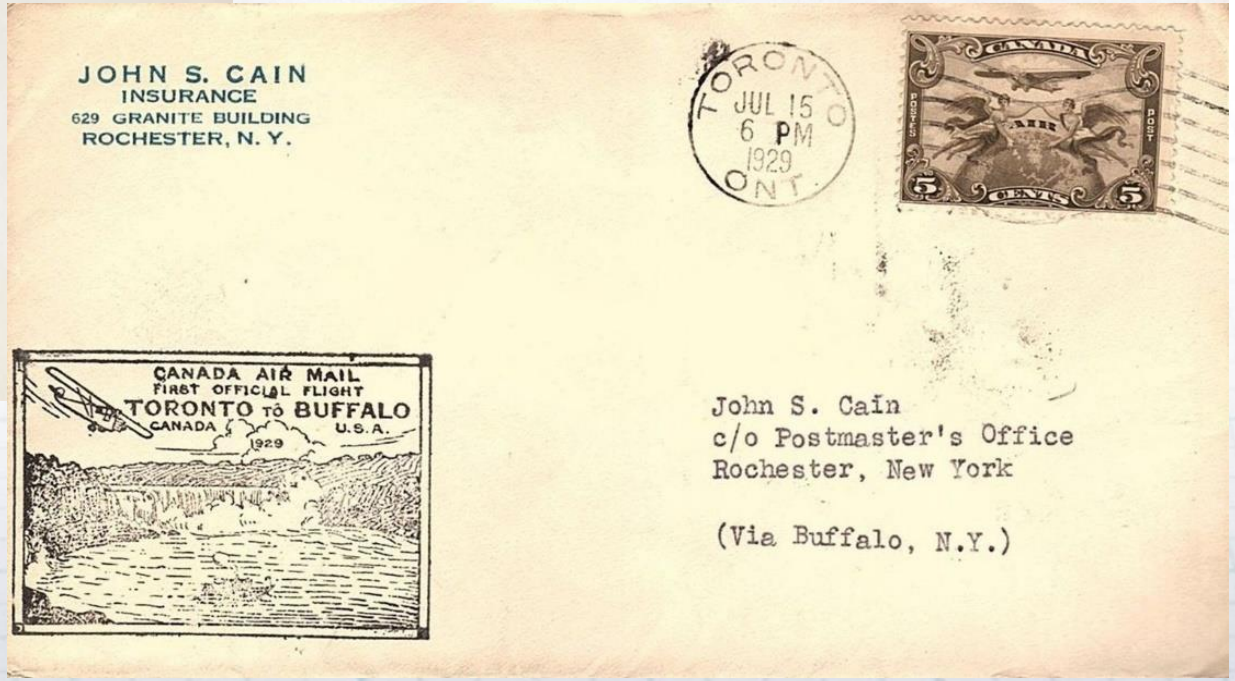
Granite Building, 130 East Main St

The structure was quickly rebuilt.



Granite Building, 130 East Main St

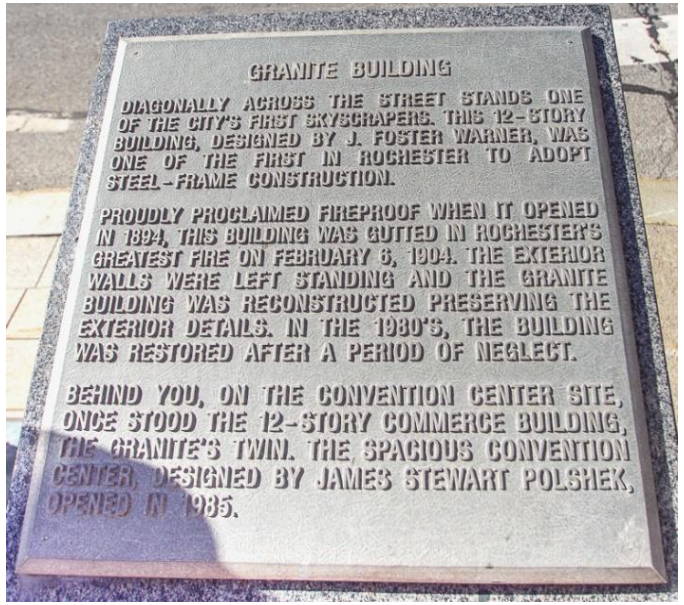


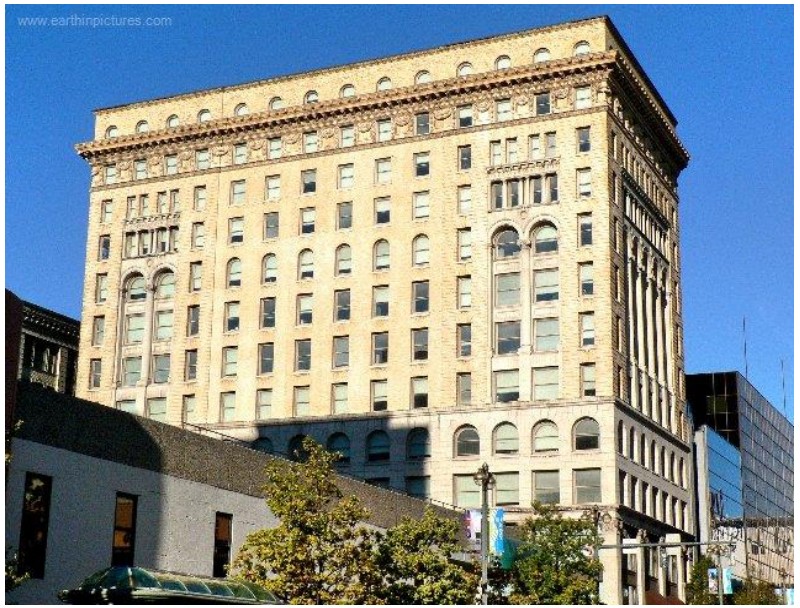


A latter assortment of insurance companies with offices at the Granite Building.

Granite Building, 130 East Main St

The Granite Building today, recently sold to CGI.

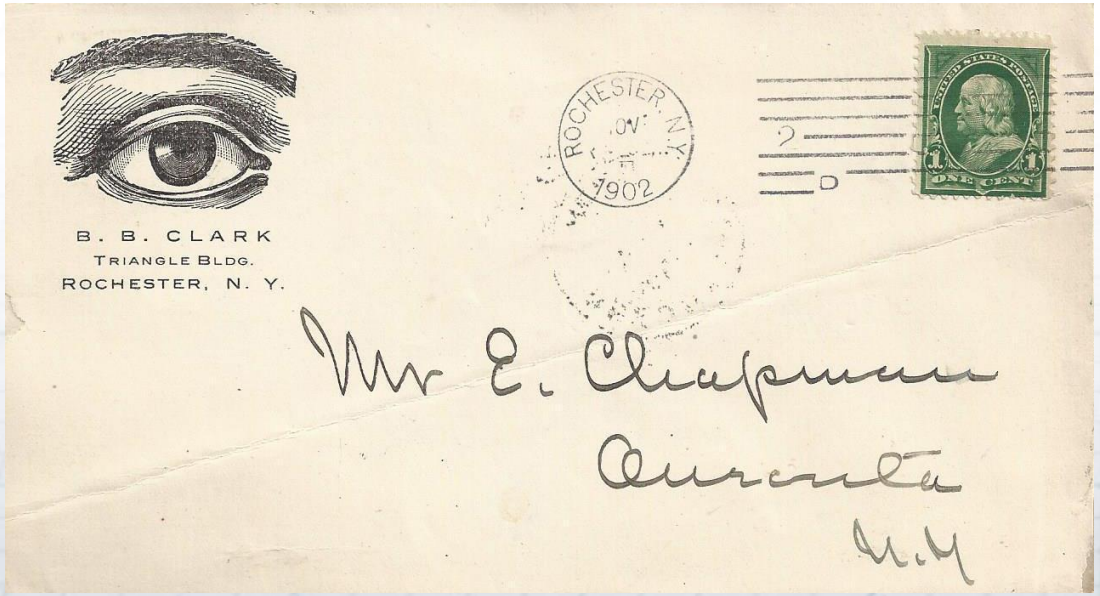




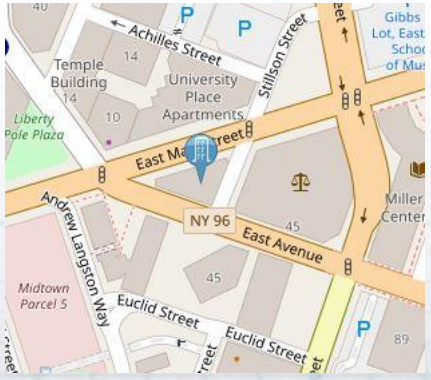
[Main Street Reborn]

Granite Building, 130 East Main St

The Sibley Triangle Building, completed in 1897, was a flatiron design of 5 stories covered in Indiana limestone on the lower 2 floors with red brick above, designed by J. Foster Warner. Hiram Watson Sibley had it built to honor his father, Hiram Sibley.

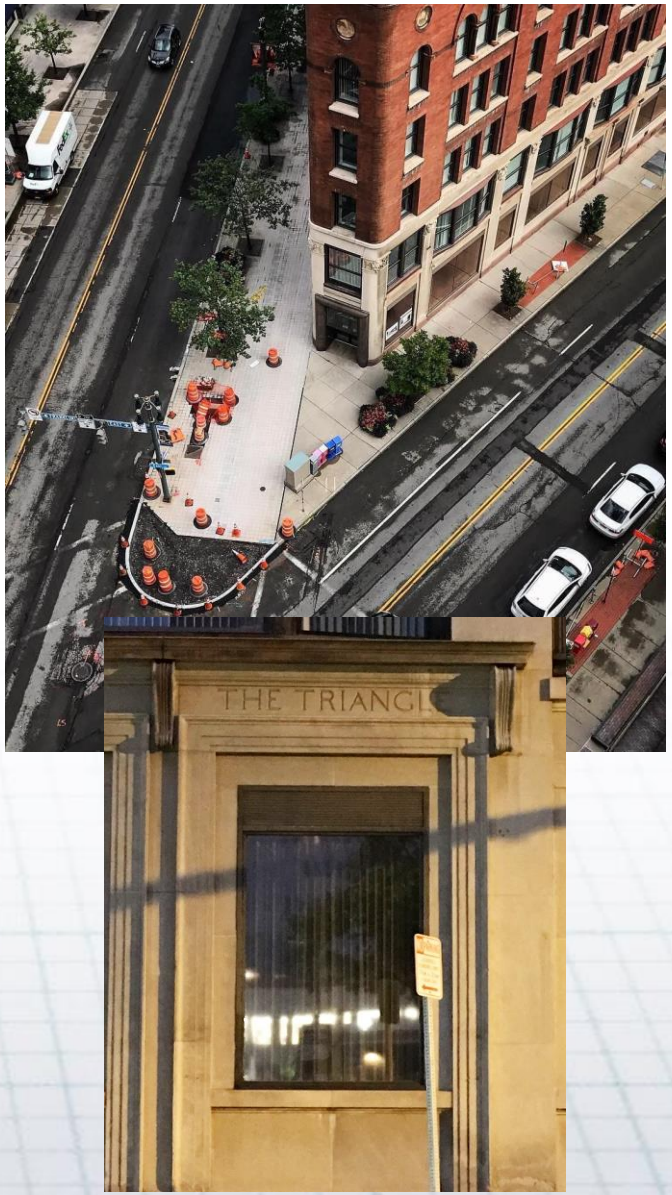


Emporis



Sibley Triangle Building, 20 East Ave

Its eye-catching shape still turns heads to this day. Controversy remains about its address-- Is it 20 East Avenue or 335 East Main Street? Recent tenants included the NYS Health Dept.



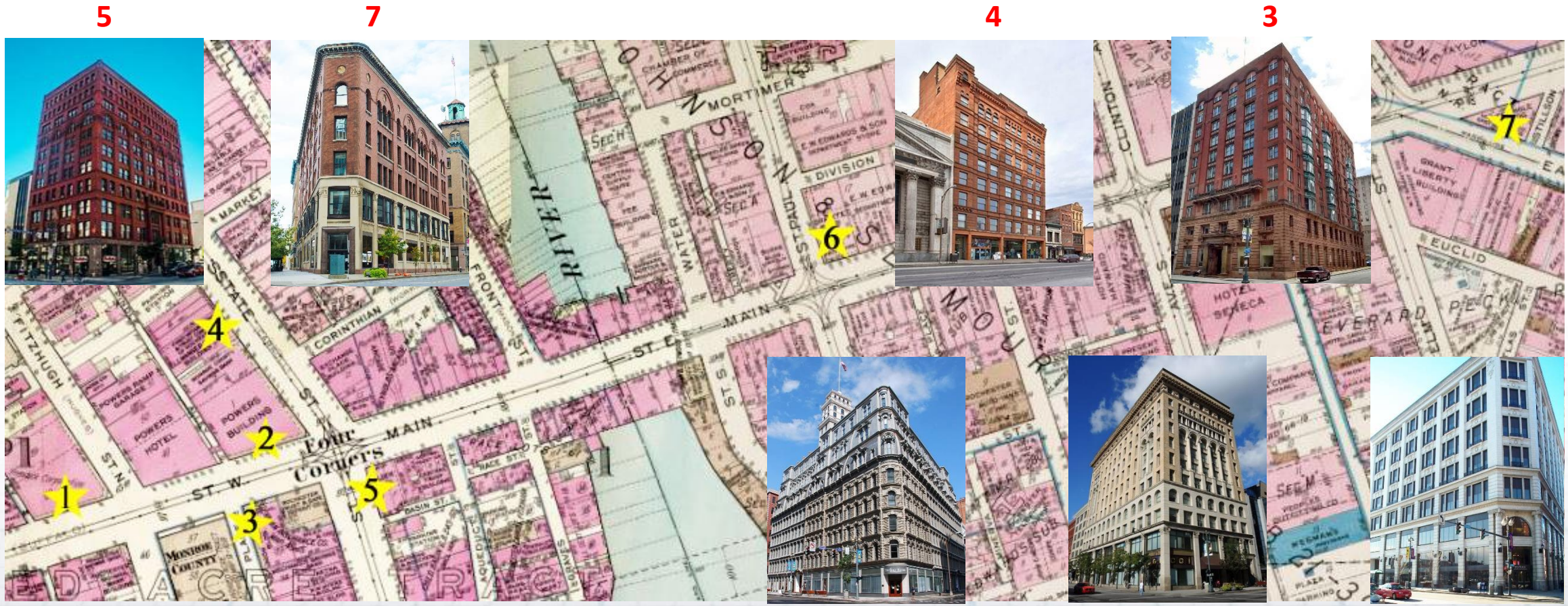
[D&C Article]

Sibley Triangle Building, 20 East Ave

OK, it's Quiz Time!
Match each building with its correct map number.

1 Duffy-Powers Building 2 Powers Building/Hotel 3 German Insurance Company Building
4 Ellwanger and Barry Building 5 Wilder Building 6 Granite Building 7 Sibley Triangle Building

How well did you do?



1 Duffy-Powers Building 2 Powers Building/Hotel 3 German Insurance Company Building
4 Ellwanger and Barry Building 5 Wilder Building 6 Granite Building 7 Sibley Triangle Building

Many thanks for watching!